4.0 PROPERTY CHARACTERIZATION

This section presents a physical description of Adak Island and the former NAF Adak, an overview of past and current operations at Adak, and a discussion of the potential for hazardous substances or petroleum releases associated with these operations.

The former NAF Adak, located in the Aleutian Islands, is a U.S. government property selected for closure in July 1995 by the BRAC Commission. The former NAF Adak encompasses approximately 76,800 acres. The installation consisted of a downtown area, former tenant commands, and various facilities scattered throughout the outback, or remote areas. U.S. military facilities at Adak were established in 1942 for air and naval operations to support World War II actions in the Aleutian chain.

Adak Island is located off the Alaskan mainland near the center of the Aleutian Island chain, approximately 1,300 miles west-southwest of Anchorage, Alaska (Figure 1-1). Its coordinates are latitude 51°53' north, longitude 176°38' west. The Island is surrounded by the Bering Sea (to the north) and the Pacific Ocean (to the south). The Navy occupied the northern portion of the Island, which is owned by the U.S. Department of the Interior (USDI); the southern portion is both owned and managed by the USDI (through USFWS) (USFWS 2000). The entire Island is included by statute as part of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge (AMNWR).

4.1 Installation History and Mission

The sections below summarize the prehistory and history of Adak Island.

4.1.1 History of Pre-Military Occupation of Adak

The first inhabitants of Adak Island were the Aleuts. Archaeological evidence reflects occupation as early as 9,000 years ago (Philemonof 1999). The Aleuts hunted whales, seals, otters, sea lions, and island birds and fished Adak’s freshwater streams and the surrounding seas. They lived in large, communal, subterranean structures of grass and earth built over driftwood or whale bone frames. The Aleuts developed technologies such as sophisticated kayaks and waterproof clothing to deal with the cool marine environment. Aleut settlements were often located in coves along freshwater streams. Remnants of prehistoric Aleut settlements remain on Adak today.

Russians first visited the Aleutian Islands in the early 1740s and were trading with the Aleuts by the 1750s. As recently as 1827, Adak was a busy trading settlement with a population of 193 Aleuts (Philemonof 1999). By 1830, Russian settlers had removed the Aleuts and occupied Adak. Adak Island became part of the Alaska Territory, which was subsequently purchased from Russia by the United States in 1867. Even after the permanent Aleut villages were
abandoned, seasonal and subsistence use of Adak Island by Aleuts continued. By 1910, overhunting by non-Aleuts had nearly depleted the once-abundant sea otter and fur seal populations. Consequently, in 1913, Adak Island was included in the 2.9-million-acre Aleutian Islands National Wildlife Refuge (renamed the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge in 1980) established by President Taft. This refuge was set aside as a preserve and breeding ground for native birds and fur-bearing animals and as an important fisheries habitat (Navy 1986). Seasonal and subsistence use of the Island by Aleuts continued up until the time of World War II, when Aleuts in the Island chain were evacuated to internment camps and future land use was restricted (Philemonof 1999).

4.1.2 History of Military Occupation

Since the early 1940s, the northern half of Adak Island has been used for military operations. Figure 4-1 is a timeline of military use to present. Ownership of the entire Island has remained with the USFWS.

During World War II, Adak Island became the site of a military base operated by the Army Air Corps for offensive action against Japanese military forces occupying Attu and Kiska Islands in the Aleutian chain. By the spring of 1944, Adak’s population included as many as 90,000 military personnel, both ship- and shore-based troops, preparing for a major offensive on the Japanese-occupied Islands of Kiska and Attu (Garfield 1969). Training requirements and associated support for these troops necessitated the creation of combat ranges for troop maneuvers, firing ranges for large-caliber artillery, small arms training ranges, and ordnance storage areas. In addition, defensive structures such as tank barriers and mine fields were conceptually planned in the event of a Japanese invasion of the Island. The nature and status of ordnance sites related to the defense activities on Adak are discussed in more detail in Section 4.2. Since the war, the military presence on Adak has fluctuated, depending on U.S. defense policy and the defined mission on Adak, and has generally not exceeded 6,000 persons (including dependents).

After the war, the former NAF Adak was transferred to the U.S. Air Force and renamed Davis Air Force Base. According to U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) records, the latter encompassed all of Adak Island. The U.S. Air Force withdrew from Adak in 1950, and the Navy assumed all facilities on Adak Island and renamed the installation Naval Station, Adak. In 1953, only 15 officers and fewer than 200 enlisted men were assigned to the former NAF Adak. In 1959, Public Land Order No. 1949 withdrew land described as representing approximately 61,000 acres (the resurveyed land mass is 76,800 acres) of Adak Island (approximately the northern half) for use by the Navy. This area is the current military reservation on Adak.
Figure 4-1
Chronology of Military Use on Adak
By 1966, military and civilian personnel totaled almost 1,000 persons and the population stayed fairly constant through the early 1970s. By 1981, the population had doubled to 2,000. In 1984, Naval Station, Adak was renamed Naval Air Station (NAS) Adak. By 1990, over 5,000 people were stationed on NAS Adak, almost 3,000 of whom were military; the remainder consisted of dependents and civilian employees. In 1994, NAS Adak was designated as NAF Adak. By this time, all military dependents had been transferred from Adak and the military force had been significantly reduced. As of February 1996, following military drawdown and closure of Naval Security Group Activity (NSGA), approximately 500 military and 50 civilian personnel were stationed on Adak.

The three Naval commands that most recently operated on Adak Island are shown in Figure 4-2. These commands are:

- NAF Adak—Host command and responsible for air operations, base management, and utility and infrastructure operations. Its military mission ended March 31, 1997.
- NAVFAC Adak—Performed oceanographic research and occupied land within NAF Adak. This tenant command was also closed March 31, 1997.
- NSGA—As another tenant command, provided communications for Naval operations in the Pacific. It has been closed since 1995.

The former NAF Adak has two areas with extensive development. The first is the downtown area of Adak, where the former NAF was located and which includes the airfield; port facilities; landfills; sewage treatment facilities; and light industrial, administration, commercial, recreational, and residential areas. The second main developed area, formerly used by NSGA, includes the northern part of the Island around Clam Lagoon. The NSGA area is no longer used, and the downtown area is being used under an interim lease.

Subsequent to its listing under BRAC in July 1995, the military mission at Adak ended March 31, 1997. A caretaker contract for the greater downtown area on Adak was awarded by the Navy and commenced April 1, 1997. The contractor was tasked to maintain former NAF Adak facilities and continue providing services (i.e., housing, food, water, wastewater, fuel, power, heating, and airport operations) to support environmental cleanup. An interim lease agreement between the Adak Reuse Corporation (ARC) and the Navy was signed in June 1998. In September 2000, responsibility for this infrastructure maintenance was turned over to the ARC and its agents or lessees.

The recent population of Adak has fluctuated between 50 and 300 people and has included Navy contractors performing environmental cleanup work, ARC and City of Adak employees and its agents and lessees operating utilities and infrastructure in the downtown area, and employees of...